



NEWS RELEASE

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DON'T THUMB IT UP: TEXTING, EMAILING, WEB ACCESS BEHIND THE WHEEL ILLEGAL AS OF AUGUST 1

Motorists Can Be Pulled Over Directly for the Violation

ST. PAUL — Text-messaging, emailing or accessing the Web on a wireless device while driving — including while stopped in traffic — is illegal on Minnesota roads effective August 1. The violation can cost up to \$300 and applies to drivers of all ages. As a primary offense, law enforcement can stop a motorist if they observe a violation of the new law.

Specifically, the law states that no person may operate a motor vehicle while using a wireless communications device to compose, read, or send an electronic message, when the vehicle is in motion or a part of traffic. The law does not apply to devices that are permanently affixed to the vehicle or global positioning systems or navigation systems.

According to the Department of Public Safety (DPS), crashes in which distraction or inattention was a factor — including text-messaging or cell phone use — are vastly underreported. The state reports distraction was a factor in at least 15 percent of all fatal crashes during 2005–2007, resulting in 240 traffic deaths. Another 1,163 motorists suffered serious, life-altering injuries as a result of distracted driving crashes during this period. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says distraction is a factor in about 25 percent of all crashes.

“When you are composing or reading a text message, your focus is not on the road, and your hands definitely aren’t on the wheel,” says Cheri Marti, director of DPS Office of Traffic Safety. “Driving is a multitasking activity in itself that requires complete attention.”

Marti says while the law is a good first step in eliminating the texting distraction, Minnesota motorists need to make a “serious effort” to remain focused on driving.

“Before you drive, put your phone out of reach so you avoid the urge to go for it,” says Marti. “If you have passengers, use them as the designated texters and have them handle your calls and texts.”

Cell phone use for teen drivers with a provisional license is completely prohibited by a law in effect since 2006. In an informal DPS Minnesota teen driving survey, teen respondents said texting was their biggest distraction while driving. Texting was also cited as the “most unsafe” behavior their friends engaged in while driving.

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